

THOUGHTS
ON THE
DEFENCE OF PROPERTY.

ADDRESSED TO THE
COUNTY OF HEREFORD.

BY *R*
UVEDALE PRICE, Esq.

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THOUGHTS

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ON THE

DEFENCE OF PROPERTY.

THE sudden and total revolution of property in France, has created very just apprehensions in other countries, where they never had existed before: for the successful invasion of other men's property, and its confirmed possession, are examples and temptations of a very dangerous kind.

The loss of property is, in itself, a great evil; but in times of turbulence, it too often includes every other evil. Proper-

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ty, then, marks its possessor as a victim; every degree of it is exposed, for lawless men seize what is at hand---in the cottage as in the palace. Rapine soon unites the plunderers into bands---separate resistance is vain, and the unresisting are not spared. Flight is difficult, is full of danger, and leads only to exile and poverty.

If a numerous and well-disciplined army, commanded by a gallant nobility, could have secured the property of a kingdom, that of France would now be in the hands of its ancient possessors. Armies, therefore, and personal courage, cannot alone secure it. On what, then, must the possessors of property depend? On themselves, on their own invincible resistance---if armed and united.

The causes of the revolution in France are interwoven with the whole of its manners and government; but of the unex-
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amplified change of property which attended it, two causes may be assigned---want of union in the possessors of property, and the consequent abandonment of that property. It is true that such a union, from a variety of causes, would not easily have taken place in France; and so general was the violence of popular commotion, that, if it had taken place, its effect may well be doubted; but still it was the only method by which there was even a chance of securing property, and personal safety, during that violence, until the causes which had produced it could be removed. With us, the danger is sufficient to make immediate precautions highly necessary, yet not so pressing as to afford no time for preparation. This, therefore, is the moment; and if a simple, practicable and constitutional plan, which, without any change in the situation of individuals, and without any expence or exertion on

the part of Government, can effectually secure this first of all objects, the execution of it surely ought not to be delayed.

If I may judge from my own experience, however limited, the plan is not only practicable, but likely to meet with rapid success. When I heard that the French had landed in Wales, I went to most of the Yeomen and Farmers in my neighbourhood, and stated to them the danger which might arise from profligate and desperate men, who, having no property, and fancying themselves screened by the protection of a foreign enemy, and by the confusion which their coming would occasion, might attack those who had property. They were all perfectly sensible of the danger and of the remedy---there was no hesitation, no backwardness on account of the trouble, or expence; but each offered to be prepared with arms and horses, (when
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horses were required,) to assist the Civil Magistrate in suppressing Riots and Disturbances. This may, truly, and without any figure of rhetoric, be called, the cheap defence of nations; but it is, likewise, the most simple and secure of all plans for that purpose---it is arming those who have the highest interest to defend, but none to attack; and if this has taken effect so immediately in a district of six parishes, why should not the circle extend itself through the whole of this county?---through the whole kingdom? It is obvious that this plan relates to the inhabitants of the country: those of towns will adopt such measures as suit their situation. Both, however, have one common cause, and, perhaps, the difference of their measures will enable them more effectually to assist and co-operate with each other.

It may, possibly, be questioned, how far any men, however resolute in themselves,

selves, and well provided with arms, could answer the purpose of their union, without having been regularly trained together to the use of those arms. There can be no doubt of the great use of training, but in this case I should not think it necessary. The great point is, that all those who have property to defend, should be provided with arms, that in each district they should know that all around them are armed, and that they can depend upon each other's assistance. Such a knowledge would give them a confidence which in their present situation they could not possibly have, and which alone would be a great source of security; and should the plan become general, it would form such a mass of armed men, united by one common interest, as, without being regularly disciplined, would resist almost any attack.

But there is a species of training, that, I conceive, would answer a very essential purpose,

purpose, and which cannot be either illegal or improper. It is well known, that nothing so intimidates a mob, or so readily disperses them, as cavalry advancing upon them in a compact body; and that is the manner of attacking them, in which we could be most useful, and which we might most easily learn. I believe there is no law which prevents twenty, thirty, or more neighbours, from meeting together on horseback, without arms, or accoutrements, just as they would ride on any other occasion, and from exercising themselves, either alone, or under the direction of some person who understood the method of training. They might thus learn to make their horses move together, just as well as if they were armed and accoutred; both men and horses would be accustomed to each other, and well prepared for acting against an undisciplined mob. For my

part, I think it so much better in our situation to have no warlike parade, that I should prefer such a method of training, even supposing it were strictly legal to be trained like regular troops.

There is no doubt of the great superiority of regular troops on every occasion; but in case of a foreign enemy on our coasts, or of widely-spread disturbances, their assistance could not be depended upon; for the most active and vigilant government could not attend to each particular district: the military would have full employment, and often a part must be neglected, often be necessarily sacrificed to more material objects. It is then that the immediate advantage of the simple and obvious plan, which I have recommended, would be felt.

The most agonizing thought that can arise in the mind of man, is, that of being left, with all who are dear to him,
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exposed to the outrages of a savage rabble, who had just begun to taste the horrid pleasure of being able to pillage and insult the peaceful and unprepared inhabitants. What misery to look round in vain for help, where all were trembling, unarmed, without confidence or connection, and expecting at their own houses the same horrid visitors! No hope, but from a distant military force, who may at last come, only to pity and revenge. At such scenes the mind is seized with frenzy, or despondency. But, change the scene!---let each man of property be armed, and let them be used to meet together; a band of plunderers appears----the alarm is given: no anxious waiting for distant help; it is at hand---all rise! it is a common interest, and each man can depend on his companion. Are the plunderers few?---they are soon overpowered. Are they more numerous?---a second, a third district, a whole

whole county is pouring in---But, why do I talk of plunderers; none would dare to appear, where property was so armed and united. But woe to the part where such a union had not taken place, for there they would direct their inroads.

This is a benefit which comes home to every man's feeling; it is the first and greatest, and the source of all others. But take it in another point of view---What, in the present situation of this island, is the chief hope of an invading enemy? The junction of those who have neither property, nor principle. If, instead of such a hope, you shew them the certainty that all the property of the kingdom is armed and united, they will renounce the idea of making any impression on such a nation; for they know, by our dear-bought experience, how impotent the attack of a foreign enemy, on a people determined to resist every species of invasion!

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But were the worst to happen; were that powerful and irritated nation to refuse all terms; were our resources to sink at last in the struggle---while property was armed and united, all would not be lost: agriculture might still go on, under the guard of those who exercised that art---the surest resource of every country. I hardly conceive any degree of misfortune that should make us despair, while property and agriculture were so secured. Should we even lose our great boast and triumph, our brave and victorious navy, and with it our extensive commerce, and all our foreign possessions, we might still, in the midst of poverty, possess freedom, security and happiness; and while the proprietors and occupiers of land are sure of enjoying its produce in security, the seeds of national prosperity, like those of the various grains by which we are nourished, may lie unproductive for years, yet not lose their productive power.

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If I have drawn this gloomy picture--- so unlike, I trust, to any thing that this nation can ever exhibit---it is to shew whence a cheering light may be thrown on its darkest shades; it is a light, also, which, as it would brighten adversity, will add the truest and most lasting splendour to the fairest colours of national prosperity.

But it might be asked, will it be safe to arm so numerous and independent a body? It might be asked with more truth and force, will they be safe if unarmed, and unconnected? And were there no other answer than such a question, it would be sufficient. But there are timid minds, which, while they dread anarchy, dread also a decided remedy; who would groan over the danger, yet fear any means of preventing it.

Can they imagine that men will leave their own property, in order to pillage that of others? Property inspires a love
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of order, and a dread of confusion; and if property cannot be trusted to defend itself, where no other prompt and adequate defence can be expected,

Let every one hence to his idle bed,
Till each man drop by lottery.....

The Yeomanry Cavalry is a most respectable body, and their active exertions when they were called upon, shew how much may be expected from them on every future occasion: but the spirit of that corps has induced them to offer their services to Government, to be employed out of the county, during the time of actual invasion, wherever their exertions may be judged most useful. This offer, which reflects high honour on their courage and loyalty, would probably leave the county "deserted at its utmost need;" for the time of external pressure, is precisely that of internal danger.---The probable absence of such a corps, at such
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a moment, is therefore a manifest and forcible reason for a fixed, internal, voluntary defence---of men independent of every controul but that of the laws, which it is so much their interest to respect and to make respected, and of their own unquestionable zeal for the preservation of peace and good order.

But let us suppose, that, instead of being ever subject to the orders of Government within the kingdom, the Yeomanry Cavalry, according to the apparent spirit of their institution, were appropriated, at all times, solely to the defence of their native county; what could be done by sixty or eighty men, however brave, zealous and active, in case of widely-spread popular commotions, or of the inroads of plunderers from other parts of the kingdom? Such lawless bands might procure intelligence where the military is employed, and rush on the defenceless parts;

parts; but should this union take place, there would be no defenceless part---all would be calm as in profound peace, yet all prepared for the most vigorous resistance.

In whatever point of view I consider this union, it is so full of advantages, that I wish it were interwoven with our manners and customs in peace, as in war. The striking difference between this and every other Monarchy, is, that there are more gradations of property; that they are all equally secured, and equally favoured by the laws; and that the intercourse between the highest and lowest, is less separated by the pride of rank or fortune, than in any other kingdom. Whatever promotes that union and intercourse, promotes the essential happiness and security of individuals, and of the state at large; and what can so promote it, as that men of the greatest,
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and of the smallest property, should, in the defence of it, serve together on equal terms? Nor let the proud man be afraid that rank or property should be lowered by such a union: they will always have the effect they ought to have; they will not alone supply the place of personal merit, but they will in every case give it a decided advantage; for there is a very natural prejudice in favour of those who possess them, which cannot be eradicated, but by gross and repeated abuses.

But it may be asked, is property, in this and similar cases, always an adequate security? Have not men of the greatest property, who had the greatest stake in the country, sometimes been the first to raise confusion? Yes, the ancient feudal Barons, or a modern Duke of Orleans. But to whom did that most unprincipled of mankind, give arms and money? To the most profligate and desperate men

men of a great metropolis; to those who had no interest in the welfare of their country. What is the body, to whom I now propose to arm and unite their efforts in the cause of peace and security? Not vassals and retainers, not the needy, idle, and seditious of any class,

But a bold Yeomanry, their country's pride.

Such a body is invincible when defending itself; for there is a clear motive, and a pressing interest: but no pretended grievances can seduce it to begin an attack, and this is the natural and certain effect of a divided property, secured, as far as law can give security. Vast possessions may give ambitious views, and ambition destroys local attachments; but even the cottager, with a few acres which he has tilled and manured---who sees part of their produce in his small barn, and part flourishing on the ground---has at least as much attachment to his little

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spot, as the greatest lord to his immense domain; and that attachment is much less liable to be weakened by outward circumstances.

It may be said, however, that, supposing the lowest of these to be no less firmly attached to his country than his wealthiest neighbour, yet there may be many indigent and disaffected men, who will seize the same pretext and opportunity for arming themselves. If this be meant of the labouring poor, they are in general a patient, and much-enduring race; and he who can scarcely buy bread, will hardly buy arms, unless driven to despair by long ill-treatment: should, however, any of that class shew such a disposition, the whole property of the parish is interested to watch over them; and, in any case, it is an additional argument for arming and trusting those who can alone be responsible

ble for their conduct. Needy and disaffected men of other descriptions, will not want or wait for any pretext; and, therefore, we should try to be beforehand with them. In whatever light the subject is considered, every argument tends to the same point---that of trusting and encouraging property to defend itself.

The great body of men in such a union, must be composed of those who are employed in agriculture, and to those I now principally address myself. The line of conduct you have to pursue, is so simple and so clear, that no person can possibly mistake it, or be misled. The great advantage of this union is, that it makes no difference whatsoever in the situation of those who compose it, either in their way of living, or in the general disposal of their time: when we are provided with arms, and have been used to meet together, should any disturbance happen,

we shall all act precisely as we should at this moment, on a similar occasion. For instance, were I, or any other Magistrate, to request the assistance of any of you in quelling a set of rioters, who had attacked a house in your neighbourhood, or were committing any other outrage--- I trust there are few who would be backward in giving that assistance. That is all that will ever be required, nor should you engage for more. Should you be called upon in your present situation, unarmed, and unprepared, you would take the first weapons that came in your way, run without order to the spot, and act with courage, but without concert. What would be the difference, after you were prepared for such an occasion? You would have arms always ready; you would know how to act in concert with your neighbours, and with greater confidence in yourselves, and them.

them. This is the whole difference; and if you will believe me, you will not engage for any thing further.

It may, possibly, be proposed to you to have officers appointed by Government, or to be attached to the Yeomanry Cavalry. Were you to be attached to any corps, or to serve on a military principle, you could not be attached to a better; but then you would, like them, be liable to be commanded out of the county; and so far from consenting to that, you ought not to be commanded in it; for, in my decided opinion, that would destroy the whole advantage of our union. Your place, is on your own premises, where your daily occupations are equally useful to your country, and to yourselves, and where you are always in readiness to defend, what it is your first duty and purpose to protect from every injury---your own, and your neighbour's property.

perty. The great point, therefore, on which your own welfare, and the use which you may render to your country, depends, is, that you should not be subject to any military regulations, in any shape or form whatsoever; but that you should remain precisely in the same situation in which you are at present---under the controul of the Laws, and the direction of the Civil Magistrate.

Among the various benefits which would arise from a union conducted on these principles, none would be greater than the security it would inspire in the minds of those, who, without the prospect of such ready assistance, might feel uncertain whether they should stay at home, or fly to some place of imagined safety. If you are armed and united, every man's place of safety is his own house---surrounded by a circle of defenders, whom no force can oppress, no arts can seduce.

Military

Military men of every description, are by no means uninterested in the success of this plan. Few of them are without some near relations or connections, to whom their thoughts are often returning, but for whom, before this fatal war, they had only to fear the common accidents of life. None, however, are so deeply interested in its success as the Yeomanry Cavalry; for should a serious invasion take place, and with it, what is too often the consequence, internal commotion, they would, undoubtedly, go where their services were thought most necessary for the general good: but it must be a hard struggle between duty and affection, when they were to leave all those, to whom they are bound by the closest ties, or with whom they are connected by long habits of social intercourse, without any defence: for there could be no hope of any other military assistance when even they were ordered from their own county.

county. Whatever can relieve the minds of brave men, from that which alone damps their ardour, is a public and private benefit of no ordinary kind.

Every good man anxiously looks forward to peace, as the greatest blessing in itself, and as the time when the heavy burthens of this country may be lessened. One of the first objects of economy, and which can then only take place, is the reduction of our army. Such an enemy, however, as France, with its encreased territory, may induce Government to continue a much larger standing army, than was usual in times of peace. But should such a firm, internal defence, as I have proposed, take place, a much smaller regular force would be necessary; and he must, indeed, be a bad man, or, at least, one of those, whose private interests are connected with public calamity, who would not rejoice at such a reduction:

reduction: for it has the double advantage of lightening our burthens, and of restoring men to that condition, from which as few as possible should ever be drawn.

This Address is confined to those persons, who, from their property, have visibly a stake, and an interest in the country. But there is a class of men which has little or none, whose welfare is intimately connected with our own: I mean the industrious labouring poor. This county, and I believe every other throughout the kingdom, has lately, in very trying times, given such proofs of attention and benevolence towards them, that little needs be said. I cannot, however, dismiss the subject, without a few words on so essential a point; rather to deliver my own sentiments, than presuming to give any guidance, or direction to yours. In every generous mind, strength
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and security encrease and nourish the seeds of humanity: I trust that such will be the effect of our union, and that it will be shewn by a general and encreased attention to the welfare of that most useful and necessary body of men---the labourers; for without their genuine attachment, however firmly we may be united to each other, our union would be far from complete.

If what I have stated, is clear and plain; if the motives are pressing; if the line of your conduct is safe and obvious, do not delay a moment. Remember what you have to lose---how easily it may now be defended, and how short a time may leave you nothing but regret!

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